Hi, my name is Bianca and I’m a French major and an aspiring teacher. This past Fall, I had the opportunity to spend my first semester of SFU’s Professional Development Program (PDP) at the University of Tours in France. I embarked on this 4-month long adventure with five fellow Canadian SFU students.

Here are some tips to guide you along so that you can make the most out of your time spent abroad. :)
Preparation for exchange

Leading up to your exchange, there will be some paperwork to fill out and complete. Stay organized and anticipate the unexpected.

Paperwork for housing

- If you intend on applying for financial aid from CAF (Caisse d'allocations familiales), you'll need copies of your birth certificate translated in french. I would recommend ACS Traduction, a translation agency based in Grenoble, France (https://www.traduction-assermentee-officielle.com/fr/). I placed an order with them before leaving for France and my certificate was mailed to me in a couple of days.

Paperwork for your visa

- I applied for the inter-university student 3B visa. For more information on the types of visas that you may be eligible for, refer to the following link: https://ca.ambafrance.org/ExperienceFrance.
- When preparing your paperwork for your visa appointment, make sure that you’re following an updated checklist.
- Book your visa appointment as soon as you can and ensure that you have all of your documents ready to go. Proof of health insurance (with repatriation) is essential. If you’re missing any documents on the day of your scheduled appointment, you’ll be given two hours to come back to the consulate with the correct ones. Otherwise, you’ll have to reschedule another appointment. Avoid the hassle and come prepared!

Packing

- Summer in France lasted longer than expected (mid-October). Make sure to bring some attire that will keep you cool (i.e. shorts, tank tops, sandals)
- When it rains, it pours. Don’t forget to pack an umbrella.
- The temperature in Tours fluctuated. Some days were mild, others were chilly, especially towards December. Bring at least one thick jacket and layering pieces such as cardigans, sweaters and fleece.

Travel and transportation

- If you plan on travelling frequently by train in France, I would recommend signing up for the « Carte Jeune », which offers a 30% discount on regional (TER) and high-speed (TGV) train tickets, if you’re under the age of 27. You can sign up online or at any train station. If you choose the latter, make sure to bring an ID photo, which will be glued onto the card.
- Make sure to have your « Carte Jeune » on you if you buy your train tickets at a reduced rate. SNCF train personnel will ask to see it. Otherwise, you’ll be fined.
- Try to have a rough idea of where you want to spend your school breaks so that you can book transportation tickets in advance, which will save you money.
  - You’ll have two breaks during the Fall semester: La Toussaint (end of October) and Christmas break (mid December-New Year). Refer to the university’s academic calendar so that you can plan your travels accordingly.
Financial details
- Before leaving the country, visit your bank and ask them about alliances that they have with ones in France, so that you know how and where to withdraw money without service fees. With ScotiaBank, I was able to withdraw money with no fees at ATM’s linked to BNP Paribas.

Additional details on housing
- Before leaving for France, you’ll have to set up an appointment with your residence so that you can get the keys to your room upon your arrival. You’ll receive an email from Crous regarding this procedure.
- Be prepared to pay your first month’s rent at your scheduled appointment. I didn’t see this coming. Luckily, I had my credit card on me.
- You’ll need to pay for housing insurance. I chose MAE. For more information, refer to the following link: https://www.mae.fr/contrats/assurance-habitation
- You’ll also need a “caution logement”. I chose Visale: https://www.visale.fr/#/!

During exchange
All things school related
- Attending orientation will inform you about campus resources that will be accessible to you during your exchange.
- Course content and weekly schedules will be posted on l’ENT (l’environnement numérique de travail), which is comparable to Canvas. You’ll have to log in regularly, as this is where class times, classroom changes and assignments will be posted.
- Getting oral presentations out of the way early in the semester worked for me. Just know that the workload can pick up, so try to stay organized and devise ways to stay on top of everything.
- You’ll be able to print documents at the campus library (B.U.) or at Copifac (located across the Tanneurs residence).
- Working with and getting to know other French and international students, on and off campus, was enriching and memorable for me.
Extra-curricular activities
- I signed up for Tandem, a language exchange program that pairs you up with native French speakers who want to improve their English skills. I got together once a week with my partners, on or off campus. You’re free to talk about topics which interest you, switching languages halfway through each 1-hour long session.

Recommendations
- For baked goods, I would highly recommend Hardouin Boulanger (39 Place du Grand Marché) which is located two minutes away from the Tanneurs residence.
- For coffee, I would suggest:
  - Au Café d’en face (21 Place des Halles)
  - Le Petit Atelier (61 Rue Colbert)
  - El Cafecito (43 Rue du Grand Marché)

Personal favourites in Tours
Strolling along the Loire river and hanging out at the Guinguette in the summer (pictured below)

Socializing at La Place Plumereau (pictured below), the historic centre of Tours. Grab a drink with friends and/or dine at any of the surrounding restaurants.
Shopping at the farmers market at les Halles. Although I didn’t go as often as I would’ve liked, visiting the market is a cultural experience in and of itself and it’s a great way to support local vendors and buy regional, seasonal and affordable produce.

Reflection after exchange

Words of wisdom

- Don’t be afraid to speak up in class. Sometimes, it can be intimidating to express yourself in a foreign language, but just do your best, push your comfort zone and be vocal.
- Bring your individuality to the table. Your professors and peers will benefit from experiences and perspectives that you share during class.
- Try your best to be productive during the school week and then spare your weekends for down-time. When school gets hectic, making time to unwind and re-energize will make all the difference or else you’ll find yourself more stressed than you need to be!
- Adapting to a foreign school system can take time. At the end of the day, try to take away knowledge that resonates with you.
- Time flies! Travel as often as you can.